

RI EXECUTIVE CLIMATE CHANGE COORDINATING COUNCIL

SCIENCE & TECHNICAL ADVISORY BOARD

Meeting Minutes

1st Meeting

Monday, September 21, 2015

(RIDEM, Room 300)

In attendance: Peter August, URI, Board Chair
Todd Bianco, PUC
James Boyd, CRMC
Kelly Knee, RPS/ASA
Jason Osenkowski, DEM
Ronald Pitt, RIC
Timmons Roberts, Brown Univ.
Henry Walker, EPA

Absent: Carol Thornber

Chair August opened the meeting at approximately 1:00PM and welcomed Board members and attendees to the first meeting of the Science & Technical Advisory Board (STAB). In addition, he provided opening remarks concerning his role as Governor Appointee Chair in the operation and functioning of the STAB. Following his opening remarks and introduction, Chair August then asked each Board member to briefly introduce themselves and to highlight the most important high-priority topics or activities that the STAB should initially focus on.

The next order of business was the election of Vice-Chair and Secretary. Chair August indicated that two nominations were received for Vice-Chair in advance of the meeting. The two nominees were H. Walker and T. Roberts and a paper ballot was distributed to members to vote for their selection. Chair August indicated that Board member Carol Thornber was unable to attend the meeting, but that she had earlier provided to him her selection for Vice-Chair. After all votes were tallied Henry Walker was elected as Vice-Chair. J. Boyd was the only nominee for Secretary and was voted to that position by unanimous consent by Board members in attendance.

Following election of Board Vice-Chair and Secretary, Chair August and DEM Director Janet Coit (EC4 Chair) offered remarks on the duties and responsibilities of the STAB indicating that the Board will be systematic and transparent in its work and will be accountable for meeting its charge. Pursuant to R.I.G.L. § 42-6.2-5, the STAB serves to advise and support the Executive Climate Change Coordination Council (EC4) on matters of science and technical information relating to climate change. Chair August stated that he had been in communication with Sheila Dormody, Chair of the EC4 Advisory Board, to discuss progress of priority actions. Director Coit briefed the STAB on EC4 work accomplished to date. She also stated that the Governor is very interested in the working of the EC4 and Boards for developing effective state policy to address climate change impacts and communicating effectively to the public on climate change issues and adaptation efforts. Director Coit indicated that she expects the STAB to assist the EC4 in aligning priorities on economic and ecological impacts while bringing expertise and diverse perspectives to inform the EC4. Chair August indicated that the Board would follow Robert's Rules of Order (light) for conducting its business and that he would establish a listserv so that Board members could communicate efficiently with one another and for sharing information.

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The next agenda item was a discussion of STAB member action priorities. Chair August indicated that he wanted to make the work of the STAB interesting, focused and supportive of the EC4 and then requested each Board member to briefly highlight their individual priorities. They were as follows:

H. Walker: Interested in flooding issues. Good work already accomplished in providing information on flooding vulnerability in coastal areas, but there is an opportunity to provide more information to reduce risk for inland flooding. Especially interested in bridge infrastructure and culvert design to accommodate flood waters (both current and future conditions) with an update in design codes.

K. Knee: Evaluate existing data sets for use in building adaptation capacity; identify knowledge gaps; access to reliable information at the local level; how to communicate reliable climate change information to stakeholders and the public (what are we observing now); make the distinction between weather and climate; and use a number of well-established tools (maps/data) to convey messages to the public.

R. Pitt: Look at data sets in state government and private sector; focus on both short- and long-term issues; due to its size and compactness RI should lead the way in creating job opportunities to address climate change issues.

T. Roberts: Develop report or website with 4 sections: (1) impacts and models for climate change; (2) actions – what are we doing on mitigation and are we doing enough? (3) review of initiatives on adaptation/mitigation in other jurisdictions; and (4) evaluation – adequacy of actions and develop resiliency metrics – bold statements for responsible actions.

J. Osenkowski: Information gathering for setting priorities in land management (50 and 100 years into the future); address conflicting management priorities; and establish priorities for conservation of species/habitat in consideration of climate change.

T. Bianco: Communicating confidence in knowledge - decision makers needed good information; ensure decisions being made are not costly to society; developed least costly solutions to meet demand and inherent risk; help identify what solutions have highest potential outcomes for success, as RI has not been good at implementing off-the-shelf solutions.

J. Boyd: Communicate issues with sea level rise and coastal flood inundation, precipitation changes resulting from climate change and how it affects stormwater infrastructure (solutions); can RI meet a higher renewable energy standard given compact size; ecological impacts from climate change (especially coastal wetland habitat); and the economic impacts and consequences of inaction.

C. Thornber: Chair August indicated that C. Thornber had communicated that given her position on the RI National Science Foundation Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) her priority was in mobilizing funding and eliminating funding gaps for collaborative cutting edge research on climate change issues.

The Board then discussed some short-term activities focusing on communication as a top priority. Additionally, information on sea level rise, coastal adaptation, inland risks, and biodiversity would be helpful to inform agencies and stakeholders. There was discussion as to where is the best place to host a web portal to direct folks to good climate change information. Suggestions also included addressing heat island effects, public health issues and the Department of Health report on adaptation actions to assist the most vulnerable populations within the state. It was recommended that the Board establish long-term climate change monitoring needs.

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Further discussion addressed key decision making at state and local levels for adaptation efforts and how existing state programs and regulations may impact those efforts. How does decision making work within key state agencies? Example: Are new RIDOT bridge designs climate change ready? Discussion continued regarding a point of contact within the Governor's office on climate change issues. Other questions were: What are state agencies doing? What are the academic institutions doing? And, what are the federal partner agencies doing? It was recommended to create a listserv for communication; establish a simple webpage to send interested parties to; investigate the mechanics for inventorying project planned or underway; and specifics on what data is being inventoried. The Board concluded that three areas of interest for communication were: (1) a single point of contact on climate change issues within the Governor's office; (2) short-term priorities of the EC4; and (3) consensus of STAB to EC4 on ongoing activities (e.g., greenhouse gas reduction plan). In addition, it is important to know what the priorities of the Advisory Board are in communicating climate change. There was further discussion regarding information overload and the benefits of developing some factsheets with bulleted points of important issues as a product of the EC4 along with a map to help guide information seekers.

Public Comments:

Julia Gold commented on need to focus on human health impacts especially as temperatures increase, what data is needed and what is missing (how to gather), and communication both internally within state agencies and externally to stakeholders and the public. Link communication efforts with events that have happened.

Jan Reitsma commented on the risk and temptation to go from science to policy issues, leave policy-making to the EC4. Ask the EC4 what they want the STAB to undertake in assisting state efforts and assist EC4 in communication. Natural resources have been neglected and need to be considered for their role in adaptation as cost effective solutions (e.g., preserving coastal ecosystems to protect inland areas from storm surge). Communicate importance of maintaining natural resources to protect assets.

Pam Rubinoff stated that the URI Coastal Resources Center is engaged with researchers and can help compile/synthesize information to share with the Board.

Vincent Flood indicated that the Statewide Planning Program had completed a transportation vulnerability analysis for state assets at risk from sea level rise and that they were starting a similar initiative concerning socio-economics and environmental justice impacts for high risk populations.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:08 pm.

Respectfully submitted by STAB Secretary James Boyd

(Approved 12-9-15)